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U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

ADMINISTRATIVE APPEALS OFFICE

425 Eye Street N.W.

BCIS, AAO, 20 MASS, 3/F

Washington, D.C. 20536

File: [REDACTED] Office: NEBRASKA SERVICE CENTER

Date: JUL 10 2003

IN RE: Petitioner:  
Beneficiary:

Petition: Petition for Special Immigrant Religious Worker Pursuant to Section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(4), as described at Section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(27)(C)

ON BEHALF OF PETITIONER:

SELF-REPRESENTED

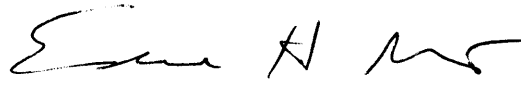
**INSTRUCTIONS:**

This is the decision in your case. All documents have been returned to the office that originally decided your case. Any further inquiry must be made to that office.

If you believe the law was inappropriately applied or the analysis used in reaching the decision was inconsistent with the information provided or with precedent decisions, you may file a motion to reconsider. Such a motion must state the reasons for reconsideration and be supported by any pertinent precedent decisions. Any motion to reconsider must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reconsider, as required under 8 C.F.R. § 103.5(a)(1)(i).

If you have new or additional information that you wish to have considered, you may file a motion to reopen. Such a motion must state the new facts to be proved at the reopened proceeding and be supported by affidavits or other documentary evidence. Any motion to reopen must be filed within 30 days of the decision that the motion seeks to reopen, except that failure to file before this period expires may be excused in the discretion of the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (Bureau) where it is demonstrated that the delay was reasonable and beyond the control of the applicant or petitioner. *Id.*

Any motion must be filed with the office that originally decided your case along with a fee of \$110 as required under 8 C.F.R. § 103.7.

  
Robert P. Wiemann, Director  
Administrative Appeals Office

**DISCUSSION:** The immigrant visa petition was denied by the Director, Nebraska Service Center, and is now before the Administrative Appeals Office (AAO) on appeal. The appeal will be dismissed.

The petitioner is a church, seeking classification of the beneficiary as a special immigrant religious worker pursuant to section 203(b)(4) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (the Act), 8 U.S.C. § 1153(b)(4), in order to employ him as a sacristan at an annual salary of \$12,600 plus room.

The director denied the petition, finding that the beneficiary's volunteer work with the petitioner was insufficient to satisfy the requirement that he had been continuously carrying on a religious occupation for at least the two years preceding the filing of the petition.

On appeal, the petitioner submits a letter from the petitioning church's director that states that the petitioner has provided the beneficiary with room and board since 1994 and the beneficiary had been working as sacristan continuously since 1994 on a full time basis.

Section 203(b)(4) of the Act provides classification to qualified special immigrant religious workers as described in section 101(a)(27)(C) of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1101(a)(27)(C), which pertains to an immigrant who:

- (i) for at least 2 years immediately preceding the time of application for admission, has been a member of a religious denomination having a bona fide nonprofit, religious organization in the United States;

- (ii) seeks to enter the United States--

- (I) solely for the purpose of carrying on the vocation of a minister of that religious denomination,

- (II) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization at the request of the organization in a professional capacity in a religious vocation or occupation, or

- (III) before October 1, 2003, in order to work for the organization (or for a bona fide organization which is affiliated with the religious denomination and is exempt from taxation as an organization described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Code of 1986) at the request of the organization in a religious vocation or occupation; and

(iii) has been carrying on such vocation, professional work, or other work continuously for at least the 2-year period described in clause (i).

The petitioner in this matter is a religious organization affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. The petitioner failed to state the size of its congregation or the number of employees. It submitted evidence that it has the appropriate tax exempt recognition. According to the Bureau's database, the beneficiary was ordered deported and departed the United States in 2003.

In order to establish eligibility for classification as a special immigrant religious worker, the petitioner must satisfy each of several eligibility requirements.

At issue in this proceeding is whether the beneficiary had been continuously carrying on a religious occupation for the two years preceding the filing of the petition.

8 C.F.R. § 204.5(m) (1) states, in pertinent part, that:

All three types of religious workers must have been performing the vocation, professional work, or other work continuously (either abroad or in the United States) for at least the two year period immediately preceding the filing of the petition.

The petition was filed on May 16, 2001. Therefore, the petitioner must establish that the beneficiary was continuously carrying on a religious occupation since at least May 16, 1999.

The petitioner submitted a letter from its director stating that the beneficiary has been working as a sacristan since 1994 to the present on a volunteer basis.

The director concluded that a claim of voluntary service to one's church was insufficient to satisfy the requirement of having been continuously engaged in a religious occupation.

The statute and its implementing regulations require that a beneficiary had been continuously carrying on the religious occupation specified in the petition for the two years preceding the filing of the petition. Because the statute requires two years of continuous experience in the same position for which special immigrant classification is sought, the Bureau interprets its own regulations to require that, in cases of lay persons seeking to engage in a religious occupation, the prior experience must have been full-time salaried employment in order to qualify.

Here, the letter from the petitioner's director states that the beneficiary has worked for the petitioner on a volunteer basis. It cannot be concluded that the petitioner has overcome the director's concerns.

The burden of proof in these proceedings rests solely with the petitioner. Section 291 of the Act, 8 U.S.C. § 1361. Here, the petitioner has not sustained that burden.

**ORDER:** The appeal is dismissed.